

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2218

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 5377

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, ELAB, AR

SUBJECT: CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES ELECTS SANCHEZ TORANZO - POLITICAL
TENSIONS INCREASE

REF: BA 5304

1. AS EXPECTED THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES ON AUGUST 7 FORMALLY ELECTED SANCHEZ TORANZO AS NEW CHAMBER PRESIDENT, REPLACING THE DEPOSED RAUL LASTIRI. THE VOTING WAS NOT WITHOUT DRAMA, HOWEVER, FOR UNTIL LATE AFTERNOON IT WAS NOT CERTAIN "VERTICALISTAS" WOULD BE ABLE TO MUSTER QUORUM. NEEDING 122 MEMBERS PRESENT TO HOLD SESSION, CHAMBER COMMENCED MEETING AT 6 PM WITH 132 MEMBERS ANSWERING QUORUM CALL.

2. DIVISIONS ENGENDERED BY ELECTION OF SANCHEZ TORANZO WERE EVIDENCED BOTH BY THE VOTING AND COMMENTS MADE ON FLOOR BEFORE AND AFTER VOTE TAKEN. OF 242 MEMBERS OF CHAMBER 142 ARE MEMBERS OF FREJULI BLOC, OF WHOM 118 ARE JUSTICIALISTAS. DESPITE HAVING SUFFICIENT VOTES FOR A QUORUM WITHIN MAJORITY BLOC, YESTERDAY'S SESSION COULD NOT HAVE BEEN HELD WITHOUT PRESENCE OF 12 MEMBERS OF MINOR NON-FREJULI PARTIES. MOST OF DEFECTIONS WITHIN FREJULI BLOC CAME FROM LABOR SECTOR PLUS SOME POLITICAL SECTOR PERONISTS AND PORTION OF THE MID. FERDINANDO PEDRINI, JUSTICIALISTA BLOC
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LEADER, IGNORING DEFECTIONS WITHIN PERONIST RANKS, NOTED ABSENCE

OF ALL 51 UCR MEMBERS AND ACCUSED PARTY OF BEING ENGAGED IN "GOLPISTA" POLICY. PERONIST LABOR DEPUTY ADOLFO PONCE WAS MORE EXPLICIT SAYING THE UCR WAS ABSENT BECAUSE THEY "HAVE GONE KNOCKING ON BARRACKS DOORS AND FOUND ONE OPEN."

4. THE UCR ISSUED A STATEMENT JUST PRIOR TO OPENING OF MEETING SAYING IT WAS "IN COMPLETE DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PROCESS USED TO NAME THE CANDIDATE FOR THE CHAMBER PRESIDENCY," ADDING THAT IT WAS THE DUTY OF THE OPPOSITION TO TAKE ACTION TO DEFEND THE CONSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY OF THE NATION'S INSTITUTIONS. SEVERAL MINOR PARTIES ISSUED STATEMENTS ECHOING THE UCR STATEMENT.

TM FOLLOWING HIS ELECTION SANCHEZ TORANZO TOOK PRESIDENT'S CHAIR AND MADE BRIEF ADDRESS. HE CASTIGATED THOSE WHO BECAUSE OF PERSONAL GREED OR POLITICAL AMBITION WERE WILLING TO SEE COUNTRY PLUNGED INTO A CIVIL WAR. HE ALSO DENIED THAT A POWER VACUUM EXISTED IN ARGENTINA, CLAIMING THOSE WHO USED THIS PHRASE WANTED TO SEE THE COUNTRY FALL INTO CHAOS.

6. IN ADDITION TO POLITICAL HEAT GENERATED BY CONGRESSIONAL ACTIVITY, POLITICAL SITUATION IN BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE ALSO EXHIBITED SIGNS OF GREAT TENSION. VICTOR CALABRO, THE GOVERNOR AND PROMINENT FIGURE IN METALWORKERS UNION, HAS PUBLICLY ASSOCIATED HIMSELF WITH THE ANTI-VERTICALISTA FACTION. HE GAVE DEMONSTRATION OF HIS CLOUT ON PROVINCIAL LEVEL BY OUSTING VERTICALISTA FACTION FROM LEADERSHIP OF PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE AND INSTALLING ANTI-VERTICAL FACTION. THIS ACTION HAS PLACED HIM ON COLLISION COURSE WITH INTERIOR MINISTER BENITEZ AND 62 ORGANIZATIONS LEADER LORENZO MIGUEL. POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT THIS CONFLICT WILL MANIFEST ITSELF ON NATIONAL LEVEL AS VERTICALISTAS - ANTI-VERTICALISTAS STRUGGLE MOVES TO ISSUE OF REORGANIZING NATIONAL JUSTIALISTA PARTY. ACCORDING TO VERTICALISTAS THE REORGANIZATION IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN IN MID TO LATE AUGUST. CALABRO IS EXPECTED TO BE ONE OF KEY LEADERS IN ANTI-VERTICALISTA CAMP IN THIS FIGHT.

7. FINAL SOUR NOTE IN LATEST SPATE OF POLITICAL INFIGHTING WAS SOUNDED BY INTERIOR MINISTER BENITEZ, WHO COMPLAINED THAT STATEMENTS BY CONGRESSMEN DURING HIS TESTIMONY WERE AMONG MOST BITTER HE HAD HEARD IN MANY YEARS. THIS, ACCORDING TO BENITEZ, DESPITE CONFIDENTIAL

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FACT HE HAD OFFERED COMPLETE COOPERATION WITH CONGRESS AND HAD ANSWERED QUESTIONS FULLY.

COMMENT: BITTERNESS ENGENDERED BY YESTERDAY'S VOTE HAS FURTHER STRAINED PERONIST RANKS. MOREOVER, WITH ATTACK ON UCR AND EXPECTED BATTLE BETWEEN VERTICALISTAS AND ANTI-VERTICALISTAS ON PARTY REORGANIZATIONS, PROSPECTS FOR ACHIEVING POLITICAL CONCENSUS STRONG ENOUGH TO DEAL WOTH ECONOMIC SITUATION ARE FAST DIMMING.

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